Henry James's characterological types fall into sharply defined groups which do not lend themselves to the conventional classification of good and evil. They are more adequately understood in terms of the subtler contradistinctions in human nature as dramatised by the ideas of refinement. The refined are those who realise their own freedom within, and permit an analogous realisation in others. Good is essentially that which is open to the free flow of refinement, and evilis whatever frustrates this nimble plasticity of human possibility.

The conventional interpretation of James's novels as illustrating the dialectic of morals and manners acquires a fresh orientation when one applies the criterion of Jamesian refinement. Taking America as the basic metaphor of morals, and Europe as that of manners, James builds up an organic trans-Atlantic vision of human culture as a single manifestation of human truth. Lying on a European frontier of historical experience, America was forced upon its own independent resources. The product of the outstretched European conscience, America was called upon to redeem her isolative acculturation by the discovery of an autonomous culture of its own. The problem of America had been, from the beginning, to explore the cultural identity for herself in terms of a structure of reality, in which concrete historical universals were by definition, or by inhibition, excluded from its New World experience. An over-grown adult in conscience, America was yet a groping adolescent in cultural consciousness. To a Europe overburdened with the tyrannical minutae of aristocratic civility and feudal propriety American innocence was a desirable consummation. But to America, whose culture was in the nonage, innocence and its unshaped and uncrystallized self-images were of the utmost tragic consequence. American innocence could be fatally exposed like all "cloistered virtue" to the unexpected and unpredictable onslaughts of experience, against which an unformed character and an unevolved intellect may find it

hard to sustain themselves. Henry James puts American innocence to the test of European experience, in which process the true and the false, the genuine and the spurious elements in American character may be properly sorted and dramatised in sharp contrast. The dramatic catalyst,, which introduces the mechanisms of human variation and differentiation, is the idea of refinement. American conventional morality, its constant fear of undefined experience, its cultural infancy, its artistic impotency, and its democratic naivete are all in tfce way of salutary refinement, which stands as a force for a creative